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# Head of CIA predicts further rough going for Soviets--and trouble for Gorbachev

By Mark Matthews

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WASHINGTON — The outgoing director of central intelligence said yesterday that Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev's future is "increasingly uncertain" and that growing instability has aroused new concern that some Soviet weapons could fall into the wrong hands.

William H. Webster said that the Soviet Union's efforts to reform its collapsing economy so far had amounted to mere "talk," and he predicted an inevitable departure of republics from the union in spite of economic pressure from the Kremlin.

His bleak assessment, in a farewell briefing with a group of reporters, came as envoys dispatched by Mr. Gorbachev continued meeting with senior Bush administration officials in a bid to persuade the United States that the Soviet leadership is serious about economic reform and deserving of Western aid to help achieve it.

As the envoys, led by Yevgeny Primakov, prepared to meet with President Bush today, administration officials said the steps outlined so far fall short of the fundamental reforms required.

They also remained uncertain whether the Soviet leadership has the political will to launch the painful changes required.

A key question is whether Mr. Gorbachev fully embraces a far-reaching reform plan still being developed by Soviet economist Grigory Yavlinski and a group of Harvard specialists.

Mr. Webster makes a practice of trying to steer clear of policy debates, but he said that the Soviets lack "a clear game plan" for using the aid and have avoided tackling the basics of economic growth.

In the years that he has watched

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**WILLIAM H. WEBSTER**  
 Retiring CIA chief

them, "I cannot really see any specific focus on improvement of infrastructure — the things that make our system work here, good roads, good rails, good telecommunications, good electricity," Mr. Webster said.

Earlier this month, U.S. intelligence agencies predicted a continuing sharp decline in the Soviet economy.

Mr. Webster said that "Gorbachev's future is increasingly uncertain." Despite a more decisive recent shift toward reform, "the question remains, is it too late for Gorbachev?"

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"He has unleashed a set of forces that went beyond his own vision, it seems to me, and he has not managed to deal with the question of privatization [and] the other things that are necessary to achieve real market reform.

"It's all talk."

Mr. Gorbachev may lose the initiative in reform to republic leaders such as the Russian Federation's Boris N. Yeltsin, Mr. Webster said.

At this point, those leaders may see more advantage in keeping a centrist leader such as Mr. Gorbachev as president than in seeking his ouster, while nevertheless pursuing their own agendas, the CIA chief said.

But he predicted that the Soviet Union was on the "path" toward splintering and that as many as five

republics could follow Georgia's lead and assert their independence.

"I think we will see efforts to pull the last remaining economic strings from the center to make departure more costly," but that won't reverse the trend, he said.

As internal struggles mount, Soviet leaders are showing increasing concern about the safety of their weapons arsenal and about protecting missile sites and controls from falling into the wrong hands, Mr. Webster said.

"We see them paying more attention to this in ways that suggest they are not as confident as they've been in the past that everything can stay in place."

This, in turn, "lowers the level of our confidence," Mr. Webster said. The safety of Soviet weapons systems is something that the United States will have to "pay a lot of attention to as the central government loses its control on the ground in areas where different political views obtain or where there is more ethnic violence."

Mr. Webster contrasted the Soviet failure to invest in infrastructure with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's all-out effort, since losing the Persian Gulf war and crushing a rebellion, to get "electricity back into shape" and repair bridges.

Lacking oil revenue, Mr. Hussein appears to be using the brute power of a military dictatorship to get the work done, Mr. Webster said.

The Iraqi leader is "very much in charge" and will remain so without a "continued concerted policy by coalition members to encourage those things that will result in his removal," Mr. Webster said.

The Bush administration has ruled out easing economic sanctions while Mr. Hussein remains in power, and Iraq's inability to export oil may be crucial over time in securing his downfall, Mr. Webster said.

President Bush has named Deputy National Security Adviser Robert M. Gates, formerly a top CIA official,